

The Road to Equality: Women Empowerment **in Pakistan**

Women empowerment refers to allowing women to exercise their rights, pursue their ambitions, make informed decisions, contribute to social development and play a central role in shaping the future of the country. In a country like Pakistan, where gender inequality is prevalent as a mainstream issue, women empowerment has been continuously overlooked on a personal and governmental basis; Despite the small progress made, women are still not treated in the same way as in other countries like the USA and in Europe: True Equals.

Women empowerment, since it's directly linked to equality, is a key ingredient to achieving tangible national progress, internal stability and community satisfaction from all regions of Pakistan. Creating adequate opportunities for education, employment and leadership for women is significant for the society and its prosperity. Either being denied these opportunities based on stereotypical attitudes or a lack of adequate opportunities to participate in, such scenarios are equally harmful for the country, both individually and communally.

One of the primary and most significant barriers to empowerment is the limited access to education for girls, particularly in rural areas of Pakistan. In some areas, schools don't accept girls as students or the parents are very reluctant to send their children to schools; instead remaining at home helping their mother seems more beneficial. Additionally, the more plausible case is that there are no schools and educational institutions in areas like Kohistan and Barkhan.

According to UNICEF, around 22.8 million children between the ages of 5 and 16 are out of school in Pakistan, and a significant portion of them are girls: this explains why Pakistani women are very behind economically. There's only one solution to this: Greater Range of Educational Opportunities. Educating women is like educating a family, which is equivalent to educating a society: it leads to a higher family income (when both the husband and wife work), reduced child labour rates, and increased social mobility, which consequently opens up a wide array of job opportunities. This chain of events helps uplift under-privileged areas as women from these areas start to dominate jobs positions in the economic sector, contributing to greater economic resilience.

As evident by the Pakistan-IMF problems, Pakistan's economy is incredibly fragile as of this moment: increased interest rates on loans and a very low export to import ratio exacerbate this crisis. On the other hand, the inclusion of women into the industrial workforce in the primary and secondary sectors would reduce the dependency ratio in many areas around the country: less burden on men would mean their energies can be dedicated to more strenuous tasks and reduced economic disparity this way could mitigate the effect of loans and their interest rates. For example, to help further this idea, the Benazir Income Support Programme

(BISP) and Kashf Foundation (KF) provide financial aid to women from impoverished areas like Greentown in the form of microloans so that they can transform extreme poverty into personal small business; this not only helps women individually and helps show them as an equally capable member of the workforce but also encourages a drastic shift in traditional attitudes to such schemes.

However, Pakistan still places immense importance on restricting women to work like men in similar jobs and capacities due to religious and cultural factors. Some communities in areas like Northern Sindh and Western Balochistan still believe that women empowerment will impact women and their place in Pakistani community adversely: it might challenge traditional gender roles, leading to a breakdown of the family unit. Therefore, it is believed that confining women to households is a better choice as too much independence given to women might disrupt family values, which is factually wrong and just solely based on traditional beliefs crafted by ancestors of such families.

There's also a new founded fear of some people regarding these empowerment programs: such enacted schemes might only benefit urban women or those already in good positions, often missing the whole point of the program and ignoring those in very under-privileged areas since that would require more dedication and money which the organisation might not be willing to give. This would aggravate the disparity, rather than heal it and yield negative results: this high level of disconnections between rural and urban women is what has led to the strong, rigid segmentation of Pakistani society into the rich and poor class.

Overall, the problem with such families is how they view and consider women empowerment: instead of taking it as a threat to tradition and cultural values, it should be seen as an opportunity to build a stronger, resilient society that prospers in all sectors, especially in the tertiary ones. The main problem is to help balance the severe cultural sensitivity which obstructs any program's success, which could be reduced through educational sessions in such areas because a lack of education makes them more inclined towards outdated traditions rather than new ideas. The educational infrastructure should be improved through collaboration with organisations like the The Citizens Foundation (TCF), which has a separate program dedicated to building schools particularly for girls. These institutions that are built with the help of public-private partnerships can help uplift a women's standard of life, and subsequently their family's.

If a man and woman are both earning, then the household income is being doubled than if just the man was doing a job. This mitigates any financial hardships they face and ensures that the quality of life index rises for Pakistan's communal areas. Another possible addition is ensuring that safe work environments exist for women which can be done through spreading awareness regarding the topic in the forms of seminars and then introducing legal constraints for such issues. Finally, women can be included in more pertinent matters, and both men and women alike can be educated on the issue of gender disparity. An example is the work currently being done by the Aurat Foundation who are making sure that no such differences remain and women can assume higher managerial roles as well.